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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001797

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SUBJECT: DEMOCRAT PARTY LEADER AGAR BETS ON THE POWER OF
POSITIVE THINKING

REF: ANKARA 1784

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4(b),(d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment. In a July 13 meeting, Democrat Party (DP) leader Mehmet Agar told the Ambassador he is optimistic that DP can win enough votes to cross Turkey's ten percent threshold and secure parliamentary seats in the July 22 general elections. Agar is counting on solid media coverage in the crucial final week to help get DP's message out and stoke the party's momentum. With polls showing DP winning between 4 and 9 percent of the vote, Agar will need more than positive thinking to make it across the victory line. End summary and comment.

¶2. (C) Agar admitted that DP initially had a hard time recovering from the botched merger of the True Path Party (DYP) and the Motherland Party (Anavatan) that was to have produced DP as the center-right alternative to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). In the end, DYP became DP and Anavatan declined to join. Agar claimed that the campaign has gained ground in the last ten days, with DP benefiting from misfiring tactics by other parties. Agar cited, in particular, National Action Party (MHP) rhetoric to reinstate the death penalty in order to execute terrorist PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan as pushing voters DP's way. The party will have to attract substantial media attention next week to pull in the votes needed to cross the ten percent threshold, he stressed. "If we can get media support, we won't have a threshold problem," he predicted.

¶3. (C) Agar is convinced Turkey needs DP in the next parliament to help the country overcome the current polarization over the Kurdish issue and the secular-religious divide. He described AKP as suffering "complexes" toward the military, secularists, the EU and the US that make it weak. "We need to normalize the situation in Turkey," he said, or we will continue to face religious and ethnic issues that are not good for Turkey. By calming conditions in the southeast, Turkey can contribute to stabilizing Iraq. A cross-border operation now would be illogical, he said, although provocations against Turkey must stop. Turks cannot ignore the deaths of "martyred" soldiers. On the key electorate issues of unemployment and security, Agar is confident DP's policies will win over voters. "DP has sensible programs for Turkey; without DP in parliament, there won't be stability in Turkey," he said.

¶4. (C) DP is pro-EU and pro-US, according to Agar. EU membership is important to Turkey's continued modernization

and must be pursued so that Turkey can serve as a convincing model of democracy and economic integration for Syria, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and other neighbors. Good relations with the EU are not enough, Agar said; Turkey needs strong relations with the US, too. In particular, Turkey and the US must work together to counter Russia's pipeline aspirations. Agar also endorsed good relations with Israel as one way Turkey can contribute to Middle East stability.

¶5. (C) Post-election, Agar predicted Turkey will stabilize if the election produces a "balance". A two-party parliament will face problems over the presidential election. With DP joining CHP and AKP (and possibly others), a consensus presidential candidate would be possible. Agar said the next prime minister must be experienced, with the authority necessary to stand firm and deal effectively with the military and other state agencies. Turkey needs leaders who can keep the military out of government and show real political will to lead, he said.

¶6. (C) Agar attributed the failed merger between DYP and Anavatan to Anavatan's unwillingness to close the party and join forces with DYP under the DP banner. Anavatan had internal problems that prevented Erkan Mumcu from doing so, he said. The merger had brought a certain amount of center-right unity, since many Anavatan hopefuls are running as DP candidates.

¶7. (C) Agar has a heavy schedule leading up to the July 22 vote, including a July 14 rally in Istanbul he expects will attract 100,000 supporters. DP has put forward a reasonable, progressive platform (reftel), but Agar's complicated past and the party's shaky start may hobble DP's chances to cross

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the threshold.

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